

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) returned to power in 2014, forming a minority government with the Green Party. However, the Sweden Democrats were the only party to make noticeable gains in the election. In early December, the Sweden Democrats withheld their support for the government's annual budget, leading the new government—which had already pledged to limit the power of the Sweden Democrats—to call a snap election for 2015. The early election was averted, however, by a long-term budget deal between the Social Democrats and the opposition alliance.

Unknown assailants carried out three arson attacks on Swedish mosques in the last week of December in which five citizens were hospitalized. No arrests were made by year's end.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 40 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Sweden's unicameral parliament, the Riksdag, is comprised of 349 members who are elected every four years by proportional representation. A party must receive at least 4 percent of the vote nationwide or 12 percent in one of the 29 electoral districts to win representation. The prime minister is appointed by the speaker of the Riksdag and confirmed by the body as a whole. King Carl XVI Gustaf, crowned in 1973, is the ceremonial head of state.

In the September 2014 parliamentary elections, the SDP won 113 seats and Stefan Löfven became prime minister in a minority government with the Green Party, which won 25 seats. The Moderates fell to 84 seats, the Center Party secured 22 seats, the Liberal People's Party won 19 seats, and the Christian Democrats won 16 seats, all suffering losses compared to 2010. The Left Party won 21 seats, a slight increase from 2010. However, the Sweden Democrats emerged as the only real winner, going from 20 seats to 49 seats and becoming the third biggest party in the Riksdag. To avert snap elections, in late December the government reached a historic budget deal with the center-right Alliance, committing the opposition to vote for all government budget proposals until 2022.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

For the majority of the last century, the SDP ruled with the support of the Left Party and, in later decades, with the support of the Green Party. Eight political parties have representation in the Riksdag; the largest are the SDP, the Moderates, and now the Sweden Democrats. The political ascent of the Sweden Democrats has continued despite ostracism from the main political parties and controversies such as the discovery of party members posing on social media with Nazi paraphernalia.

The country's principal religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups are represented in the parliament. Since 1993, the indigenous Sami community has elected its own parliament, which has significant powers over community education and culture and serves as an advisory body to the government. A 2011 Supreme Court ruling granted Sami reindeer herders common-law rights to disputed lands.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption rates are low in Sweden, which was ranked 4 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. The country has one of the most robust freedom of information statutes in the world. However, a 2012 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) admonished Sweden for insufficient enforcement of its foreign bribery laws.

Civil Liberties: 59 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16 (–1)

Sweden's media are independent. Most newspapers and periodicals are privately owned, and the government subsidizes daily newspapers regardless of their political affiliation. Public broadcasters air weekly radio and television programs in several immigrant languages. The ethnic minority press is entitled to the same subsidies as the Swedish-language press.

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by law. Hate-speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. In July 2014, controversial artist Dan Park received a six-month prison sentence and a fine of \$10,000 on charges of defamation and incitement to hatred against an ethnic group. The incident—which marks Park's third conviction for racial hatred—centered on nine posters depicting Roma and Africans in a derogatory manner. The exhibition of Park's work was shut down minutes after its July opening, and Swedish authorities destroyed the posters. Park was released by a district court in October pending appeal; the case was ongoing at year's end.

Under the 2009 Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Directive (IPRED), internet service providers must reveal information about users who are found to be engaged in illegal file-sharing. A 2012 ruling by the European Court of Justice upheld IPRED. In 2012, Sweden adopted a data retention law requiring telecommunications carriers to store data, including records on telephone calls and internet traffic, for three years. The law is in compliance with EU directives.

The 2008 Signals Intelligence Act gives the National Defense Radio Establishment the authority to monitor communications without a court order. Only the military and government can request surveillance, and those who have been monitored must be notified. The National Defense Radio Establishment has exploited a loophole in the law to gather extensive personal telephone and internet records, the use of which remains unclear.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed. Although the population is 66 percent Lutheran, all churches, as well as synagogues and mosques, receive some state financial support. In December 2014, however, three arson attacks were carried out against mosques in Eskilstuna, Eslöv, and Uppsala. The Eskilstuna mosque was attacked during midday prayer hours and resulted in the hospitalization of five congregation members as well as widespread material damage; the attacks in Eslöv and Uppsala resulted in no injuries. All three mosques were defaced with anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant slurs. By year's end no arrests had been made. Demonstrations in support of the Muslim community and against right-wing extremism were held following the attacks.

A 2013 survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights found that Swedish Jews were more than twice as likely as Jews in other European countries to hide their religious affiliation. National numbers for anti-Semitic hate crimes have held steady since registration started in 2009, but regional reports show an increase in southern Sweden.

Academic freedom is ensured for all.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected in law and practice. A string of anti-Nazi and pro-religious tolerance demonstrations took place in spring and summer 2014 in Stockholm and other major cities. Rallies by the Party of the Swedes, a tiny but extreme right-wing group, required heavy police presence, as did left-wing counterdemonstrations. During a demonstration against homophobia in Malmö in March, a group of people were attacked with a knife and one man was gravely injured. Three members of the Party of the Swedes were subsequently charged with attempted murder.

The rights to strike and organize in labor unions are guaranteed. Trade union federations, which represent approximately 80 percent of the workforce, are strong and well organized.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16 (+1)

The judiciary is independent. Swedish courts have jurisdiction to try suspects for genocide committed abroad. In 2011, Sweden sought the extradition of Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, from the United Kingdom so that he could be questioned regarding rape and sexual assault allegations stemming from two incidents in Stockholm in 2010. In 2014, a Stockholm district judge ruled against a challenge to the warrant for Assange's arrest.

The Swedish state is highly responsive in ensuring equal protection and rights for all members of the population. An equality ombudsman oversees efforts to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. A permanent hate-crime police unit was established in 2009.

Following intense media scrutiny of the Skåne police's unlawful Roma registry in 2013, the politically appointed Commission on Security and Integrity Protection found significant problems with the transparency of the list's purpose and usage, but no proof that citizens were on the registry primarily because of their ethnicity. An internal investigation of the Skåne police department was dropped in late 2013 due to lack of evidence, but some 4,000 Roma included in the registry were awarded damages.

The government announced in October 2013 that it would grant permanent residency and family reunification to all Syrian refugees—making Sweden the only country in Europe to do so. Sweden received 74,000 asylum seekers in 2014, an increase of 20,000 from the previous year. While Sweden's liberal refugee policy continues to enjoy support, a geographically unequal distribution of refugees, coupled with an ongoing shortage of housing and jobs in the affected municipalities, has caused both public and political frustration at the local level.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Citizens enjoy freedom of movement and employment. Swedes also enjoy the right to own property and establish a private business.

Sweden is a global leader in gender equality. Approximately half of Riksdag members and the same proportion of government ministers are women. Nearly 72 percent of women work outside the home, earning the equivalent of 94 percent of men's wages, when differences in age, sector, and experience are taken into account.

Same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry and adopt; lesbian couples have the same rights to artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization as heterosexual couples. The Lutheran Church allows same-sex ceremonies.

Sweden is a destination and transit point for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but the Swedish government has been proactive in combatting the problem. The 2004 Aliens Act helped to provide more assistance to trafficking victims, and a special ambassador has been appointed to aid in combating human trafficking.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)